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THE KERAMIC MUSEUM OF SÈVRES.

FIRST ARTICLE.



WOULD Denis Riocreux have experienced unmixed happiness had he been permitted to install in the new galleries of the manufactory of Sèvres the ceramic museum which he so patiently brought together?

He certainly desired most ardently to get it out of the dark and crowded rooms where he had been compelled to store it; but here, where he had hoped for perfect arrangements, he would have been confronted by the realities of the irremediable.

The most obvious defect of the structure built to contain the Ceramic Museum is in the salon, to which the central entrance gives access, where it was thought necessary to make certain sacrifices for the sake of the architecture. As it is difficult to know what to do with this hall, it is proposed to decorate its overshadowed walls by four tapestries, which are now being woven

at the Gobelins from cartoons by Lechevallier-Chevignard, and which represent the four operations of pottery-making; viz. throwing, turning or finishing on the lath, painting, and firing, called, in the elegant Latin of the Academy, *Tornatura*, *Sculptura*, *Pictura*, and *Flamma*. Under the vertical rays of the skylight which illumines this salon there have also been placed the immense pieces that are now made at Sèvres.

As this central vestibule divides the galleries into two equal parts, it was natural to think of placing on one side the opaque pottery, and on the other the translucent pottery, according to the two great divisions adopted by Brogniart. But it was necessary to give up this idea, so as to avoid empty space on one side, and over-crowding on the other.

Each of the galleries which branch off from the vestibule is divided into two parts by a central line formed of cases placed back to back, and each of these parts is again subdivided into three bays by other cases placed perpendicularly to the walls. Five cases in the central line correspond to each bay. These cases receive the typical specimens of the section, while duplicates fill the cases of the lateral bay, unless they are occupied by special series, formed outside of Brogniart's plan, and representing a different kind of ware. The largest pieces are placed upon tables which occupy the middle of the bay. The bays at the extremity of each gallery are closed, some serving as magazines, while others form rooms devoted to special series. A few specimens of large dimensions, placed as near as possible to the representatives of their kind in the central cases, decorate what we will call the vestibule of these rooms.

It will readily be seen that these bays of equal dimensions, with their uniform rigidity of plan, interpose great obstacles in the way of a classification by kinds, periods, and nationalities, which might have been carried out had the necessary elasticity been given. A bay may be too small for one class of products, and too large for another; hence the necessity of encroachments.

Finally, it has been found necessary to banish the pieces of largest dimension, other than those of the entrance hall, to a sort of crypt which serves as a central vestibule to the ground floor, and which, when the entrance door is closed, receives only a faint light through the windows of the staircase placed on the exterior. To this place are relegated the least agreeable specimens of the potter's art, those which it is impossible to classify. Furthermore, this vestibule gives access laterally, on one side, to the offices of administration, the library, etc., and on the other, to very low and badly lighted apartments, which serve as sales-rooms.

Otherwise the material equipment of the Museum shows the luxury which is habitual in the state establishments of France.

The order of classification followed is, as we have before indicated, that adopted by Brogniart in the beautiful book entitled *Description Méthodique du Musée Céramique de Sèvres*. This *Description* is the illustrated

catalogue of the Museum as it was in 1845. Proceeding from the simple to the complex, and thus following the technical and historical developments of the art, Brogniart begins with the products which show all the rugose nudity of baked earth, and from them passes on to the lusted¹ and painted vases of antiquity, to the glazed earthen-ware of the Middle Ages, and to the enamelled faïence of the Renaissance and of modern times. Coming then to the wares which, owing to a slight difference in composition, offer greater resistance, he treats of the stone-wares which are intermediate between faïence and porcelain, — that ultimate attainment of the potter's art, — with which he ends. These grand divisions of pottery into *pâte tendre* (soft paste) unglazed, lusted, glazed, and enamelled, *pâte dure opaque* (opaque hard paste), and *pâte dure translucide* (translucent hard paste), were again subdivided by Brogniart according to countries and periods, thus forming a methodic encyclopædia of ceramics.

This admirable classification, which Riocreux adopted in the provisional arrangement of what was to him a storehouse rather than a museum, has also been followed by M. Champfleury in the arrangement of the new galleries, and he has made it obvious by a system of descriptive labels attached to each object, so that the catalogue, cut up into as many labels as there are objects, is put within reach of every visitor, and serves to instruct even those who are attracted by ordinary curiosity. Any one able to read who does not derive some benefit from a visit to the Ceramic Museum of Sèvres, arranged and ticketed as it is, must certainly lay himself open to the charge of wilful indifference.

It will be seen that physics and chemistry, not art, form the basis of this classification. But although the coarse, scarcely baked pottery of the aborigines of Gaul, lately found in the caves of Southern France, is of the same nature as the machine-made bricks which are used in the construction of modern houses, a certain order nevertheless arises from the chronology of the subject. The products of each country follow one another according to the progress of civilization, and render comparisons easy.

The Ceramic Museum of Sèvres made a great impression upon the many visitors who came from all parts of the world during the last Exposition for the purpose of studying it. There are no doubt larger collections, and many that are richer in certain special lines, but there are none more complete, or arranged according to a more natural and clearer method. A rapid survey of the show-cases, following the order adopted, will easily enable us to understand its economy.

We repeat that the cases along the central line in each room form the basis of the classification, while those in the corresponding bays are but the corollaries, unless, as before stated, they are given up to special groups placed out of order.

UNGLAZED POTTERY.

Case 1 of the central line in the first gallery is devoted to Ancient Egypt. But the series of unglazed red and yellow pottery, consisting of some vases of extremely simple form, is from the very beginning broken into by the introduction of glazed, or perhaps enamelled specimens, which, logically, ought to have been introduced in other series. This kind of earthen-ware, covered by a blue or green, or sometimes a gray layer, is found in the shape of perfume-bottles, cups, and hieratic statuettes whose rigid members are enveloped in tunics without folds. Some imitations — laboratory experiments made by M. Salvétat, the chemical director of the manufactory — are shown by the side of the antique specimens.

Case 2 is given up to Greece and Phœnicia. The archaic Greek specimens are extremely like those which we shall find farther on, in the case devoted to Peruvian pottery, and the comparisons that can be made between the barbaric products of different countries, however widely separated they may be in point of geographical position or of time, are fruitful of surprises. Some of the unglazed pottery in this case is of known origin; several pieces came from the excavations on the island of Milo.

UNGLAZED AND LUSTRED POTTERY.

Cases 3 to 5 contain Greek vessels, entirely or partially lusted in yellow, black, and reddish brown, the lustre applied either uniformly, or serving to design ornaments and figures, or combined with painting executed after baking. We need not repeat here what has already been so well said by the Baron de Witte upon Greek vases. Although the Museum at Sèvres is far from offering the riches found at the Louvre, it nevertheless possesses specimens of all forms and styles of decoration, from the archaic specimens of Egyptian shape, upon the sides of which extend band friezes painted in red, of an almost Assyrian style, to the elegant Athenian lekythoi, the elongated bodies of which still show some traces of painting, which become fainter every

¹ The reader will please bear in mind that the word *lusted*, as used throughout this article in verbal translation of M. Darcel's terminology, applies to the slight glaze found upon antique vessels, and which is still an object of controversy, as to its manner of production, among specialists. The majolica with metallic reflections, usually known as *lusted ware*, is of an entirely different kind. — EDITOR.

day. Among the painted vases we will mention a panathenaic amphora, with black figures on a yellow ground,—one of the twelve known,—given as a prize in a race in the year 332 B. C. We here give a kelebe (Fig. 1) decorated with figures reserved on a black ground, which presents the peculiarity that its paintings on one side (that shown in the engraving) are unfinished. While upon one side the background is entirely covered by the black lustre applied to the finished vessel, upon the other it is simply indicated by a wide, irregular streak, which outlines the figures. It was, undoubtedly, left to an apprentice to complete the decoration. Some persons think, however, that the paintings were intentionally left in the condition in which we see them, and an attempt to imitate this method was made at Sèvres upon some vases exhibited in 1873. We must say, however, that the experiment gave but little satisfaction.—In the same cases we find also an extended series of vases coming from the excavations of Gnatia (Apulia), of a very peculiar style of decoration. Upon a uniform black ground are raised, in colors thickly laid on, garlands of grape-leaves and Bacchic masks in yellowish white and orange red.



Fig. 1.—GREEK KELEBE.

Case 6. The Etruscan specimens (unglazed and lusted) shown in this case are of considerable thickness, generally of rigid forms, lusted black, and often decorated with friezes in relief. Of the objects found in the tombs of Chiusi, we will mention a toilet-set (Fig. 2), composed of forty pieces, and placed in a sort of case which is cut out on one side.

Case 7. The unglazed and lusted Celtic, Gallic, and Gallo-Roman pottery in this case leads us to the lowest depths of barbarism. This case is filled with vases of uncertain form, of coarse, sometimes micaceous clay, fashioned without the use of the wheel, decorated with thumb-marks,—showing that ornament is a natural necessity with man,—and imperfectly baked.

Case 8: Roman pottery, unglazed and lusted. It is a great mistake to give the name of *Samian* to those pieces of handsome red pottery, often decorated in relief, the fragments of which are found wherever Roman domination extended. The models are evidently of Italian importation, and possibly this is also the case with the clay, which is throughout of the same composition. But all of them

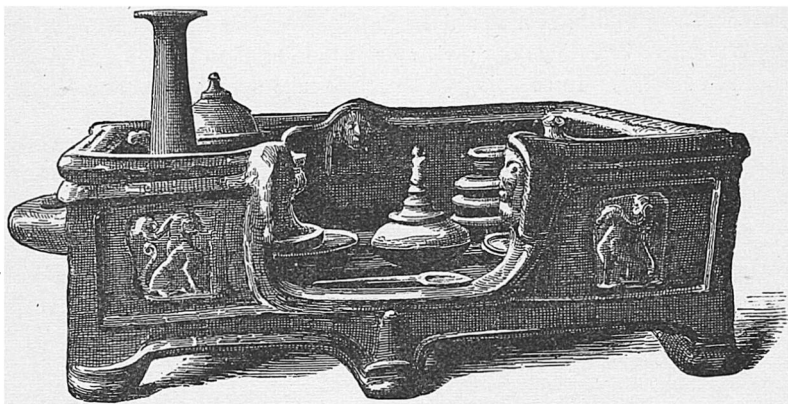


Fig. 2.—ETRUSCAN TOILET SET.

cannot have been manufactured in Italy, as the moulds were found in many places together with the vases that had been fashioned on the spot. The potter's marks on these pieces form ample lists, and sometimes differ upon vases decorated with the same patterns. Perhaps the centres of manufacture will some day be discovered.

Case 9 is devoted to unglazed pottery of the seventh to the sixteenth centuries, found in France. Numerous excavations, made by the Abbé Cochet in Normandy, by M. Matthon in the Department of the Oise, by M. Moreau at Caranda (Aisne), and by many other explorers in other quarters, have brought to light great quantities of black pottery, of simple, but — despite their stiffness — sometimes elegant forms, and decorated with impressed geometric designs. These vessels belong to the Merovingian epochs, and probably reach down to the Carlovingians, whose tombs, heretofore but little known, are doubtless often confounded with those of their predecessors. Of the period of the Middle Ages, which we shall meet again farther on, we find here only vases, incense jars, of coarse clay and quite poor in aspect, in spite of the few lines of red ochre with which their sides of indefinite form are slightly decorated.

Case 10. The unglazed specimens among the old Peruvian pottery exhibited in this case strongly recall the Celtic pottery of France, while those which are lusted, and show a geometric decoration in red or brown, approach so nearly to certain archaic Greek wares that it would sometimes be difficult to tell the one from the other.

Case 11. The Mexican pottery, with which Case 11 is filled, seems to be distinguished from that of Peru by less elegance of form, and by a tendency to give to the vases the appearance of masks or of animals. A decoration applied after baking upon an orange ground, and composed of geometric designs, is found upon some pottery of rigid form, which belongs to a period before the conquest.

Cases 12 to 15. Of the modern pottery of Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Polynesia, here exhibited, there is nothing to be said, as its rudeness is well known to everybody. A comparison with even the most archaic specimens which have come down to us from antiquity would be decidedly against it.

We have now passed in review all the cases on one side of the central line in the first gallery. Of the three bays which correspond to them, the first two contain those Greek and American vessels for which there was no room in the central cases. In the third the series is interrupted. Two of its sides are occupied by objects in relief and in the round, appertaining to all periods, from the funereal urns, the antefixes, and the friezes which the acquisition of the Campana collection has scattered in such large numbers through the museums of France, to the bricks used for casing at the time of the Renaissance in countries lacking stone for building and for sculpture.

The glazed tiles of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance fill a whole case of the third side. The coarse mosaics formed in the eleventh century by the juxtaposition of bits of terra-cotta of different colors, are followed by designs executed by the incrustation of clay of one color upon a floor-tile of a different color, and these are again developed and completed by the juxtaposition of several tiles, which change their character in the course of the centuries. In the sixteenth century another process is adopted, the design being formed by stamped patterns, and the whole covered with the same glaze.

Beyond the cases, in the vestibule of the cabinets which take the place of the bays at the extremity of the galleries, are placed a number of large pieces which do not belong to the series. Among them we will call attention to the Virgin with the Christ child, a large standing figure enamelled in white, which we believe to be by Andrea della Robbia; a gable finial (*épi*) of enamelled faïence, of the sixteenth century; a large German stove of green glazed tiles; a palm-tree of white faïence, near which are two children in terra-cotta; and a stove-pipe made at Rouen, by Henry, in 1780, and given by M. Gustave Guellain, an amateur of Rouen, known by his fine collection, as well as by his publications upon some curious faïences. Lastly, the place of honor in the centre of the vestibule is occupied by the stove of the Convention, made by Ollivier in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. It reproduces, in earthen-ware enamelled in brown, the model of the Bastille, which was made illustrious by the patriot Palloy, who in turn was himself made illustrious by M. Champfleury.

We will now continue our review by examining the central cases placed back to back with the cases which we have just studied. In so doing we shall also take up again the line of development of the ceramic art.

GLAZED POTTERY.

Case 16 contains specimens of glazed pottery from antiquity to the sixteenth century.

It is an established fact that the ancients, in Italy at least, understood the art of covering their pottery with a lead glaze, although they seem to have used it but seldom. In the Middle Ages this glaze was used industrially to give more brilliancy to paving tiles, but it was rarely applied to utensils. It is curious, also, that the process of incrustation was not used upon the latter more extensively. A fragment of a vase in the Museum of Sèvres, showing black *fleurs-de-lis* on a red ground (twelfth or thirteenth century), and two fragments of a plate in the Museum of Rouen, decorated with very fine black incrustations on a red ground (fourteenth century), are the only examples known to us.



Fig. 3.—FRENCH JUG. XVTH CENTURY.

Art was but little occupied during the Middle Ages in the decoration of earthen-ware vessels, as the nobility and the burghers used only silver, pewter, and precious woods. Wood was also used by the poor people, together with the coarse earthen-ware of which numerous specimens are shown in Case 15.

Specimens of the same class are also found in a case of the corresponding bay, in which the late Arthur Forgeais classified the collection, given by him to the Ceramic Museum, of unglazed and glazed pottery of all times, found in the soil of what in bygone times was Lutetia and is now Paris. Among these pieces of various origin, probably brought to Paris by commerce, and comprising vases, cups, lamps, salt-cellers, and children's toys, we instance a large jug with human mask of the beginning of the fifteenth century (Fig. 3),

believed to be a caricature, the protestation of some Parisian potter against the English, his temporary masters.

The pottery in relief of Manerbe and Beauvais, bricks and vessels, completes Case 16.

Case 17 carries us down to the glazed pottery of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. — Besides the products of La Chapelle-des-Pots (Charente) and the black earthen-ware which is believed to have been made in the Venaissin, we find here specimens of the faïence of Saintonge, and of the rustic *figulines* of Bernard Palissy. These, however, are for the most part covered by an enamel, and ought, it seems to us, to have found a place elsewhere, if the system of classification was to be rigorously adhered to. But as this enamel is not really painting, although in some cases it must have been applied with a brush, it may, by a strict construction, be considered as a simple covering, as in the case of the jaspered pieces made by Palissy.

Case 18 contains Italian and German glazed pottery, while Cases 19 and 20 are devoted to the same kind of ware from the East, America, and Spain. — In the corresponding bay are exhibited large quantities of plates, which are decorated by a slip (*engobe*), either according to a process practised in Italy from the fifteenth century, in which the slip, still fresh, is incised so as to show the underlying clay in the lines, or, in a more elementary fashion, by tracing the design directly upon the deposit formed by the slip in clay of another color. M. Benjamin Fillon contributed largely to the development of this section, in which the products of Saintonge occupy considerable space. The electuary vase (drug vase) which we publish (Fig. 4), and which bears the *vivre* of Milan on one side and the oil-cakes (*tourteaux*) of the Medici on the other, is a specimen of decoration by slip with *sgraffiti*, borrowed from Italy.

The remains of grottos formed of pebbles and shells cast in clay and covered with jaspered enamel, found in the Cour du Carousel in 1878, a fragment of the *Baptism of Christ*, a plaque found in the excavations in the garden of the Tuileries, and a mould in plaster from the old workshops in the Tuileries where Palissy made his wares, fill a case in this bay.



Fig. 4. — ITALIAN DRUG VASE. XVTH CENTURY.

STONE-WARE.

Cases 21 and 22 are filled with products of France, Germany, England, China, and Japan. These wares resemble an opaque porcelain, the fusibility of which varies with the quantity of iron which colors it. The nearly white stone-wares are, in fact, capable of receiving a high-fire decoration in colors, while those which are almost black, like the *boccaros* of China and Japan, can be decorated only in the muffle.

FAÏENCE.

It is well known that faïence consists of a clay covered with a layer of glaze rendered opaque by the presence of a certain quantity of tin. It is a double silicate, one of the bases being an alkali. It requires a much higher baking temperature than the pottery with a simple lead glaze. It can be decorated upon the unbaked enamel, according to the method employed by the Italians of the sixteenth century, in which case the colors must be able to resist the fire up to the point of fusion of the enamel. The decoration is also executed upon the enamel after it has been fired. This is the method followed quite too often at the present time. The colors incorporate themselves only very imperfectly with the enamel, which does not undergo fusion in the muffles in which these pieces are exposed to a relatively low temperature.

Case 23 contains Hispano-Moresque and Persian faïences. We certainly shall say nothing upon this section, even if everything that can be said has not yet been uttered. It comprises very beautiful pieces among the products of the manufactories of Spain, and has lately received considerable accessions from the East. The three specimens which we publish (Figs. 5, 6, and 7) are all parts or fragments of the casing of buildings. The one used as a tail-piece, of trapezoidal form, is decorated in relief, painted in blue, upon a ground vermiculated in gold-yellow.

Cases 24 to 30 are filled with faïence, etc., of various origin, as follows: — 24 to 26, Italian faïence and majolica; 27 and 28, faïence of Nevers; 29, faïence of Rouen; 30, faïence of Rouen and its school, from the sixteenth century to the close of the eighteenth century. We shall content ourselves with this enumeration, although among the Nevers pieces there are some which the devotees of Poterat might certainly claim as belonging to the beginnings of the Rouennese manufacture in the seventeenth century.

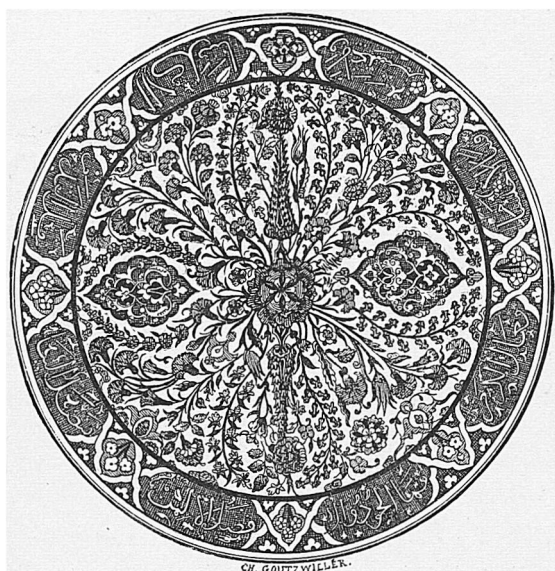


Fig. 5. — PERSIAN FAÏENCE. PART OF WALL DECORATION.

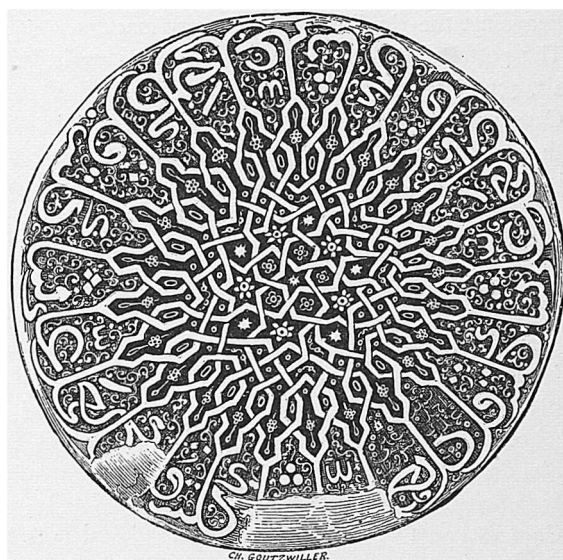


Fig. 6. — PERSIAN FAÏENCE. PART OF WALL DECORATION.

If we now cross the central hall, we shall find the same disposition in the gallery on the opposite side, and the same fish-bone arrangement of cases placed back to back, in which the series of faïences is continued.

Cases 31 to 34, like those immediately preceding, are given up to French faïence, 31 and 32 containing the products of Marseilles, Moustiers, Clermont-Ferrand, etc.; 33, those of the environs of Paris (Saint-Cloud, which imitates the faïence of Rouen, radiant in a thick coating of greenish blue; Bourg-la-Reine and Sceaux, with their imitations — often quite successful — of porcelain); while 34 is filled with the faïence of Lille, Saint-Clément, Aprey, Strasburg, and Niederwiller, and a mass of second-class workshops which local notices have dragged forth with altogether too much noise from the subdued light which became them so well.

The series is finally brought to a close with specimens of faïence from Delft, Brussels, Marienberg, Rostrand, and Germany, in Cases 35 and 36, and with Spanish and Portuguese specimens, decorated in dull blue and brownish yellow, in Case 37.

ALFRED DARCEL. (In *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*.)

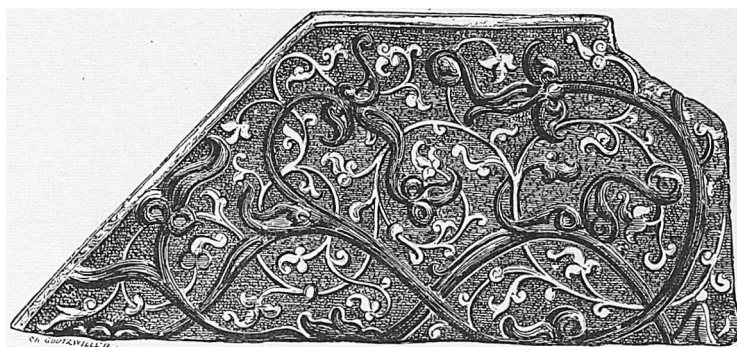


Fig. 7. — PERSIAN FAÏENCE. PART OF WALL DECORATION.